

BIG CITY MAYORS

March 12, 2023

The Honorable Bryan Hughes
Texas Senate
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711

Chairman Hughes and members of the Senate State Affairs Committee,

On behalf of our respective municipalities we are privileged to serve, we oppose S.B. 175, its companion, H.B. 3538, and any legislation that would limit our ability to advocate for the over nine million residents we represent.

As filed, S.B. 175, would expressly prohibit a political subdivision from spending public funds to hire a lobbyist. It also would prohibit a political subdivision from paying a nonprofit state association or organization that primarily represents political subdivisions and employs or contracts with a person required to register as a lobbyist. In our view, this bill would silence local officials by preventing them from effectively participating in the state policymaking process.

The ability of local and regional community leaders to be represented and heard at the Capitol provides a critical voice in deliberations on policies that will impact every resident in our area.

Thousands of bills are filed every session that affect our communities and the residents we serve, and our daily obligations and responsibilities as local elected officials prevent us from being in Austin full-time to advocate for our communities. In addition, the legislative process is complex, time sensitive, and requires specialized knowledge and expertise. It is for these reasons that we rely on experienced, professional advocates and trade associations to monitor policy proposals and ensure that our voices are heard in a timely manner, especially as it relates to the mission and functions of municipal governments. If the aforementioned legislation is passed, it would set a dangerous precedent by allowing every other stakeholder in the legislative process to hire professional lobbyists while denying the same right to local governments and their constituents.

The effort to prohibit the hiring of lobbyists and trade associations has been framed as protecting taxpayers from those who would advocate against their interests. Nothing could be further from the truth. **The local entities impacted by this effort develop legislative agendas and dedicate resources to advocate for and against legislation in the best interests of the people they serve.** Furthermore, these legislative agendas and the funds dedicated to advancing them are transparent – developed, approved and updated at public meetings. Many of the priorities are developed in concert with our community partners and

stakeholders. The goal of hiring lobbyists is in fact to maintain an active role in the statewide decision-making process as the most direct representation of the constituents.

We respectfully propose some alternate actions to ensure transparency and good stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

- Ensure that cities seeking to influence the legislature publicly adopt a legislative agenda by resolution and provide opportunities for citizen input.
- Ensure that a city's publicly adopted legislative agenda is made available on its official website.
- Ensure that city lobbying contracts are made available on official city websites.
- Ensure that protections are put in place that ensure that lobbyists can only represent cities with express authorization and in accordance with a city's publicly adopted legislative positions and agenda.
- Ensure that protections are put in place that would protect citizens from legislative consultants that have a conflict of interest between a city and a private-sector client of the consultant.

We respectfully ask that you act to protect our ability to provide an effective and impactful voice for our community by opposing any attempt to limit or prohibit the authority of a political subdivision to use public funds to communicate with legislators and state agencies, including any restrictions that would prohibit the use of public funds to pay membership dues to organizations that hire lobbyists. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this topic in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.

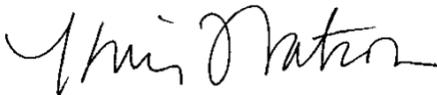
Sincerely,



Mayor Ginger Nelson
City of Amarillo, Texas



Mayor Jim Ross
City of Arlington, Texas



Mayor Kirk Watson
City of Austin, Texas



Mayor Trey Mendez
City of Brownsville, Texas



Mayor Mattie Parker
City of Fort Worth, Texas



Mayor Ron Jensen
City of Grand Prairie, Texas



Mayor Sylvester Turner
City of Houston, Texas



Mayor Rick Stopfer
City of Irving, Texas



Mayor George Fuller
City of McKinney, Texas



Mayor John Muns
City of Plano, Texas



Mayor Ron Nirenberg
City of San Antonio, Texas



Mayor Joe Zimmerman
City of Sugar Land, Texas



Mayor Dillon Meek
City of Waco, Texas

CC:

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Sen. Brian Birdwell
Sen. Morgan LaMantia
Sen. José Menéndez
Sen. Mayes Middleton
Sen. Tan Parker
Sen. Charles Perry
Sen. Charles Schwertner
Sen. Judith Zaffirini